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Weinberger fears 'shocking' damage in Marine spy case

By Bill Gertz
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A U.S. Marine guard suspected of espionage after falling into a love-trap set by Soviet agents might have caused "shocking" damage, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger told The Washington Times yesterday.

He also said the military would push for the maximum penalty against Sgt. Clayton J. Lonetree if the charges are proved to be true.

Officials have said a female agent employed at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow seduced Sgt. Lonetree into spying for the Soviet Union while he was stationed there as a security guard.

He has not been formally charged but is confined in a military jail at the Quantico Marine base in Northern Virginia.

Mr. Weinberger expressed concern over the possible damage from the case.

"Preliminary indications are that it is quite serious," he said in an interview with newspaper reporters. "It is a potentially a serious set of [intelligence] losses."

Later in the day, at a luncheon with reporters and senior editors of The Washington Times, Mr. Weinberger said, "Damage was done without any question."

"We are still assessing it and still trying to get all the facts. It would be particularly shocking if it [were] all found to be true as alleged now."

Mr. Weinberger said the case "illustrates one of the major problems of utilizing KGB people as employees in the embassy, something we worried about for a very long time."

Until late last year, the United States employed about 260 Soviet citizens at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow and the Leningrad Consulate. The Soviet Union ordered those employees to quit their jobs last year in retaliation for the expulsion from the United States of Soviet diplomats alleged to have been engaged in espionage.

Mr. Weinberger's concerns about the employment of Soviet nationals were echoed on Capitol Hill by Rep. Jim Courter, New Jersey Republican.

Mr. Courter, who has pushed for legislation banning the employment of Soviet nationals in U.S. embassies, said he believed Sgt. Lonetree could be implicated in a KGB scheme to plant listening devices in embassy typewriters between 1984 and 1985.

"Not only were our typewriters bugged, the bugs required occasional battery changes," he said. "You need repeated access for that, and State said most floors of our building were off-limits to these Soviet employees."

"But a KGB-Marine combination seems to have been an easy way around that precaution."

Mr. Weinberger dismissed suggestions that the Defense Department and Marine Corps had tried to prevent the Justice Department from handling the case because of

criticism that Justice Department officials had made lenient deals with spies in past espionage cases.

If convicted of espionage by a military court, Sgt. Lonetree could be executed.

"We certainly would want to pursue it as thoroughly and effectively as possible, and if punishment is indicated, get every maximum available form of punishment that is around, if the charges should be found to be correct," Mr. Weinberger said.

Justice Department spokesman Joe Krovisky said his department had an agreement with the Pentagon regarding espionage cases.

"Whenever a case involves an active duty military person who is a lone suspect, Defense has jurisdiction," Mr. Krovisky said, noting that the espionage ring led by convicted spy John Walker was "an exception."

Walker and his son, Navy Seaman Michael L. Walker, pleaded guilty to espionage in 1985 after agreeing to cooperate with U.S. officials conducting a damage assessment.

John Walker was sentenced to life in prison Nov. 6, although he will be eligible for parole in 10 years, and Michael Walker, who spied for the Soviets while serving aboard a U.S. aircraft carrier, received a 25-year prison term.

Mr. Weinberger was reported as saying at the time of the Walker trial

that the spies, if convicted, "should be shot, though I suppose hanging is the preferred method."

Sources familiar with the Lonetree case said Defense officials fought hard to keep the Justice Department out of the case because of Justice's handling of the Walkers and the case of convicted Soviet spy Ronald Pelton, a former National Security Agency employee caught spying for the Soviets in 1985.

Both Pelton and Walker agreed to cooperate with U.S. officials in exchange for lenient sentences. But sources said both men failed polygraph examinations, indicating that they supplied deceptive answers to questions about their spy activities.

At the State Department, spokeswoman Phyllis Oakley said yesterday that the department had been cooperating with U.S. investigators since Dec. 31, when Sgt. Lonetree was arrested by U.S. military police on suspicion of spying for the Soviet Union.

The department joined other federal investigators in "a full-scale counterintelligence investigation... and a worst-case damage assessment effort" relating to "possible security compromises at the U.S. embassies in Moscow and Vienna," Mrs. Oakley said.

Sgt. Lonetree, 25, has been held at Quantico pending the outcome of a pretrial investigation due to begin next month, according to Marine Corps officials. The Naval Investigative Service is leading the counterintelligence probe, they said.

New York attorney William Kunstler, a self-described leftist who has defended American radicals in court, has been hired as a defense attorney by Sgt. Lonetree's family, a relative of the Marine said Tuesday.

Sgt. Lonetree served as a Marine embassy security guard in Moscow between September 1984 and March 1986, and later at the U.S. Embassy

in Vienna, where he served until his activities with the Soviets were uncovered late last month, according to sources familiar with the case.

Marine security guards stationed at U.S. embassies are responsible for

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securing access to embassy buildings. They also handle classified information, and Sgt. Lonetree, according to Marine Corps officials, held a top-secret security clearance.

Officials suspect Sgt. Lonetree and his lover collaborated to help the KGB enter the Moscow embassy and plant electronic eavesdropping devices inside the compound, sources said.

Intelligence sources said that such a security compromise could result in a "devastating" loss of U.S. intelligence and diplomatic secrets.

The sources said that information collected by the Soviets inside the embassy would help the Soviets confirm intelligence data supplied to the KGB by former CIA official Edward Lee Howard, who defected to the Soviet Union last year.

Howard, a CIA case officer once slated to work in Moscow, is suspected of supplying the Soviets with the most secret information about CIA activities and agents inside the Soviet Union.



Marine Sgt. Clayton Lonetree